

REVIEW

Julian Warzecha, *Historia dawnego Izraela* [History of ancient Israel], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2005, 655 pp.

The book by Julian Warzecha is the newest and comprehensive work pertaining the history of ancient Israel in the Polish subject literature. Until now, Polish publications regarding this subject mostly had the character of Bible stories about Israel,¹ still, Polish readers could read the translations of foreign publications.² However, the small amount of this kind of works is the reason for treating every new publication in this area with special attention.

Julian Warzecha is a Catholic priest and a professor of theology at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, his fields of interest being biblical research of the Old Testament and history of literature. In 1990 he defended his qualifying thesis: "Meaning and origin of Biblical phrase to send the word" in the Department of Theology on the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw.

History of ancient Israel corresponds with J. Warzecha's previous work, *Ancient Israel. From Abraham to Solomon* issued in Warsaw in 1995. This work is defined in bibliographical references as "volume 1" and finally we have waited to see its continuation. Still, the new publication is not merely the second volume of the previous book. The content of *History...* in the area of the history of the Jewish nation until the era of King Solomon was, compared to the previous work, thoroughly changed and completed. Moreover, the narrative about the subsequent eras has been added.

¹ J. Jelito, *Historia czasów Starego Testamentu* [History of the Times of the Old Testament], Poznań 1961; T. Jelonek, *Biblijna historia zbawienia* [Biblical Story of Salvation], Kraków 1987; M. Weremiejewicz, *Historia Izraela* [History of Israel], Warszawa 1995; M. Peter, *Dzieje Izraela* [History of Israel], Poznań 1996; M. Bednarz, *Historia zbawienia* [History of Salvation], Tarnów 1997; W. Chrostowski, *Biblijny Izrael – dzieje i religia* [Biblical Israel – History and Religion], Gniezno 1998.

² G. Ricciotti, *Dzieje Izraela* [History of Israel], Warszawa 1956; W.F. Albright, *Od epoki kamiennej do chrześcijaństwa* [From the Stone Age to Christianity], Warszawa 1967; M. Grant, *Dzieje dawnego Izraela* [History of Ancient Israel], Warszawa 1991; P. Johnson, *Historia Żydów* [History of Jews], Kraków 1993; J. Bright, *Historia Izraela* [History of Israel], Warszawa 1994; *Starożytny Izrael. Od czasów Abrahama do zburzenia Jerozolimy przez Rzymian* [Ancient Israel. From the Times of Abraham to the Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans] (ed.) H. Shanks, (polish eds) T. Mieszkowski, M. Ziółek, Warszawa 1994; C. Schedl, *Historia Starego Testamentu* [History of the Old Testament], Tuchów 1995; A. Lemaire, *Dzieje biblijnego Izraela* [The History of Biblical Israel], Poznań 1998.

The author divides his history lecture into 5 parts, which are, consecutively: "memories (ideas) about the times before the kingdom, creation and development of monarchy, history of the divided monarchy, decadence of Judah and the time of exile, time of Judaism", and as the 6th part, there is appendix.

Since it does not seem to be possible nor purposeful to follow all the narrative of the book, I would like to point out only a few views of the author which I consider significant.

In the intro to his book, J. Warzecha discusses the sources of history of Israel in the period of the First Temple. Among them, there are: Yahwistic and Elohist tradition, the priestly historiography as well as Deuteronomistic Work (Joshua – 2 Kings), which J. Warzecha considers the basic historic sources. Then, he presents the problem of usefulness of the remaining historical sources in the reconstruction of events – Biblical sources (1–2 Chronicles) and archaeological data. Mention of archaeological data leads the author to a methodological reflection – the problem of relation of Biblical sources to archaeological ones appears, as well as the problem of using different methods and sciences: iconography, sociology, comparative ethnology, cultural anthropology. J. Warzecha unequivocally rejects the minimalist attitude in reference to the historical value of Biblical texts and their use in historiography, he refers to the position of S. Hermann,³ which he defines as the most balanced one and which advocates taking into consideration multiple points of view. He himself stands for simultaneous use of both Biblical texts and archaeological data in reconstruction of history of ancient Israel.

The first part of the book touches on the history of Israel before creation of monarchy. After a short study on the history of the Middle East – Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine in the period of cca. 2000–1200 B.C., the author focuses mainly on the texts about patriarchs, leaving of Egypt, settlement of Israel in Canaan. The author is consistent in using the following scheme in his narrative: characteristics of literary tradition, picturing chosen historical issues, presenting the history of religion. J. Warzecha carefully formulates his opinion about the historical reliability of texts referring to patriarchs. He draws attention to the eponymic character of the heroes and the relation of the texts to different geographic areas, he also mentions the pragmatic use of tradition referring to patriarchs in explaining the political role of the generation of Judah in the times of David and Solomon. However, he seems to be far from sharing the views of those researchers who categorically deny the existence of historical equivalents of the literary characters. He considers the period between the end of the Bronze and the beginning of the Iron Age (1400–1100 B.C.) to be a characteristic life environment described in the stories about patriarchs.

The author clearly emphasizes, referring to the research of H. Cazelles,⁴ that he rejects the view considering the fact of Israelites staying in and leaving Egypt merely as literary fiction. He considers the above mentioned events as historically possible and probable. He thinks the same in case of Moses. J. Warzecha believes that one can put

³ S. Hermann, Observation of Some Recent Hypotheses Pertaining to Early Israelite History, in: H.G. Reventlow, Y. Hoffman (eds), *Justice and Righteousness. Biblical Themes and Their Influence* (JSOT SS 137), Sheffield 1992, pp. 104–116.

⁴ H. Cazelles, Peut-on circonscrire un événement Exode?, in: E.M. Laperrousaz (ed.), *La protohistoire d'Israël. De l'exode à la monarchie*, Paris 1990, pp. 29–65.

together bringing proto Israelites to Egypt as captives with the nomadic peoples of Shasu, known from Egyptian texts – it would have taken place during the reign of Sety I or Ramesses II, i.e. around 1294–1213. Departure of one or two groups of proto Israelites should be dated around 100 years later.

In relation to the problem of the appearance of Israel in Canaan, the author presented the following scientific hypotheses: conquest, immigration, revolution and evolution; the last hypothesis he considered as the most probable. Trying to answer the question how one should understand the notion of Israel in reference to those times, J. Warzecha accepted the interpretation of the famous passage from the Merenptah stela which refers to Israel as to a people and only indirectly as a territory where this people lived. Therefore, the Israel of those times was a loose union of tribes, mostly aborigines, based on families and family lineages, the basic characteristic trait of internal organization were decentralization and egalitarianism. Respective tribes lived on highlands as well as on plains, their main occupation were farming and breeding animals. Among the tribes there were also groups which came from Egypt and brought the cult of God YHWH, which replaced and superseded the beliefs of aborigine groups of shepherds and farmers who confessed God El. The new cult was diversified geographically, the religious life of the primitive Israel developed on highlands, and its main equipment were: an altar, a cult stone and a tree. Archaeological data also indicate that in this original period the object of cult was also YHWH's wife, Ashera.

In the second part of his book, the author presents creation and development of monarchy. In a very brief presentation of the historical and political background of the history of the Fertile Crescent countries, he discusses the notion and genesis of monarchy in the countries of the ancient Middle East and in Israel. Referring to the reasons for creation of monarchy in Israel, J. Warzecha tilts towards the concept of I. Finkelstein. The author outlines the main characteristic features of Saul's (1020–1004), David's (1004–965) and Solomon's reign (965–926) as well as social changes of the period of the United Monarchy. He draws attention to the lack of objectivity in biblical texts concerning Saul and tries to rehabilitate the first ruler of Israel.

The third part of the book was devoted to the history of the Divided Monarchy (926–722). The author presents the problem with chronology of this period, he characterizes the sources pertaining to the period of 930–586, he discusses the reasons and consequences of the split up of Solomon's monarchy. Then, he outlines the political, social and religious history of both Israel countries until 722 B.C. The last fragment of the third part as well as the first fragment of the fourth part of the book present the situation of Judah after the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. The fourth part touched on the decadent part of the history of Judah and the times of the Babylonian captivity. J. Warzecha drew special attention to the religious changes of the exiled community – emphasizing Sabbath, circumcision, passing from monolatry to monotheism, underlining the role of an individual and a family in development of religion.

The fifth part is entitled *Time of Judaism* and it presents the history of Israel during the times of the Second Temple in three periods, called Persian, Hellenistic and Roman. In the Persian period, J. Warzecha drew special attention to the coming of subsequent groups of the exiled people, the work of rebuilding the temple, the changes in the area of theology (he differentiates the Deuteronomistic, priestly and prophetic

environment) and religion. The author also outlines a picture of the political history (he stands for the concept of the existence of a separate province of Judea besides Samaria in the first decades after the exile) and social history (he draws the attention to growing social discrepancies, impoverishment of a part of the people and progressing atomization of the society). The large part of the chapter focuses on the activity of Nehemiah and Ezra, especially on the problem of chronology of these characters. In the author's opinion, Nehemiah came for the first time in 445, and Ezra – in 428 B.C., it is also possible that the two reformers met during the second mission of Nehemiah.

The study of the history of Judea in the Hellenistic period presents a wider political and cultural background of the Hellenistic world. The author presents the downfall of the Persian state, the person and the work of Alexander the Great, fights of diadochoi and creation of the countries of Ptolemies and Seleucids, Syrian wars, coming of Judea under the dominion of Syria. Also the relationship of Antiochus IV Epiphanes with the Jews, the Maccabean revolution, history of the Hasmonean dynasty were described. In relation to the issue of hellenization of Judea, J. Warzecha refers to the opinion of M. Hengel.

The Roman period was discussed in three parts. In the first part, the author presented taking the power over Judea by the Romans, the political history until dismissing Pontius Pilate, he also made a few remarks on the cultural and economic situation. In the second part, the author characterized religious and political groups: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots. At the end, he presented the history of the war with the Romans (66–70), the situation after the suppression of the first Jewish uprising and the history of the Bar Kokhba War (132–135).

The sixth part comprises two appendices: history of the ancient Israel and the Alexandrian diaspora. The first appendix comprises the analysis of the notion of history and historical consciousness in Israel, characteristics of biblical historiography, the author dedicated a significant part of his reflections to the comparative material of antique literatures of the Middle East. The second appendix presents the history of Jews in Alexandria under the reign of Ptolemies, in the time when the power over Judea was taken by Seleucids and in the Roman period.

It seems that this work, which is good in many aspects and the best one – without any doubt – in the Polish publishing market, evokes a few reservations. The author is an expert on the history of ancient Israel during the First Temple Period. Personal interests and his scientific profile were clearly reflected in the number of pages which were devoted to certain issues. The first four parts of the book (out of six) were dedicated to the First Temple Period, from prehistory to the period of the Babylonian exile, which takes cca. 355 pages. But the history of Israel of the Second Temple Period is described in merely 1 part: *Time of Judaism* and one of the two short appendices, altogether giving only about 180 pages.

I think that in the intro the author should reverse the sequence of narration – first carry out a methodological discourse and only then characterize the sources. After all, whether the given sources are discussed at all, depends on the methodological position.

Later, in the part *Jews in the Hellenistic period* a few weaker points of the book can be observed. Having in mind the framework of this review I will mention only a few issues. In reference to the problem of hellenization of Judea, J. Warzecha refers to the

concept of M. Hengel. But he takes the information from the source⁵ which is, as I think, secondary in relation to the basic work for the author of the hypothesis: *Judentum und Hellenismus*.⁶ Moreover, one can, obviously, accept the views of M. Hengel, but it is good to know and pay attention to the fact that this hypothesis is not the only possible and evokes certain doubts;⁷ also, the problem of hellenization of Judea seems to be extremely complicated, which should be the factor preventing from drawing such univocal pictures in this kind of works.

Also, the author quotes the passage from 2 Maccabees 4, 9 about registering the inhabitants of Jerusalem as Antiochians. Nevertheless, he interprets it as a creation of the institution of politeuma in Jerusalem. In the subject literature, the author of this view is E. Bickermann,⁸ but his view was rejected, because there is a common agreement that this passage testifies of the foundation of polis.⁹ It is curious that the work of E. Bickermann is not included in the bibliography of the author.

Indeed, the problems of chronology of the Maccabean period are difficult and ambiguous. However, the distinction between specific Egyptian campaigns of Antioch IV is one of the most elementary issues (which is lacking in J. Warzecha's work), especially that these campaigns are very significant for the Jewish-Seleucid relations.¹⁰ It seems that Antioch IV profaned the temple after coming back from the first Egyptian campaign and religious persecution was the result of the events which took place after the second Egyptian campaign.¹¹ Therefore, one cannot place all the events after the second campaign (or the conflict with Egypt in general), as J. Warzecha does it.

⁵ J. Warzecha refers to M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism Revisited*, in: J.J. Collins, G.E. Sterling (eds), *Hellenism in the Land of Israel*, Notre Dame 2001, pp. 6–37.

⁶ M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, Tübingen 1969.

⁷ See F. Millar, *The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel's „Judaism and Hellenism“*, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978), pp. 1–21; K. Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judäa*, Göttingen 1983, pp. 99–111; U. Rappaport, *Maccabean Revolt*, in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D.N. Freedman (ed.), vol. IV, published by Doubleday 1992, p. 438; J.K. Aitken, *Review – Martin Hengel, „Judaism and Hellenism“*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004), pp. 331–341; L. Feldman, *Hengel's „Judaism and Hellenism“*, in *Retrospect*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977), pp. 371–382; K.G. O'Connell, *Review – Martin Hengel, „Judaism and Hellenism“*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004), pp. 329–331.

⁸ See E. Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, Berlin 1937, pp. 59–65.

⁹ See V. Tcherikover, *The Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, New York 1970, pp. 161–169, 404–409; M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, Tübingen 1969, pp. 505–507; Ch. Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch, Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, Gütersloh 1976, pp. 216; F. Millar, *The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel's „Judaism and Hellenism“*, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978), pp. 10–11; K. Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judäa*, Göttingen 1983, pp. 66–74. Extra attention should be paid to – W. Ameling, *Jerusalem als hellenistische Polis: 2 Makk 4,9–12 und eine neue Inschrift*, *Biblische Zeitschrift* 47 (2003), pp. 105–111.

¹⁰ There is also one article on this issue in the Polish subject literature – see J. Ciecieląg, „Ohyda spustoszenia” a problem wizyt Antiocha IV Epifanesa w Jerozolimie. Przyczynę do dziejów prześladowań Żydów przez Seleucydów [The “Abomination of Desolation” and the Problem of the Visits to Jerusalem of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. A Footnote to the History of Seleucid Persecution of the Jews], in: *Amicorum Dona*, F. Kiryk, M. Wilczyński, J. Ciecieląg (eds), Kraków 1998, pp. 55–61.

¹¹ See E. Bickermann, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

Summing up, we need to state that the author is a true pundit, especially in the area of the history of the First Temple Period. His work is the newest, the most comprehensive and undoubtedly the best work so far in Polish literature in the subject which pertains to the history of ancient Israel.

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